

6267 Castille Ct.,
Orleans. K1C 1X4

Ms Micheline Savoie,
Portrayal of Persons,
CBC Head Office,
1500 Bronson,
Ottawa.

April 25, 1989

Dear Ms Savoie,

Thank you very much for the pleasure of meeting you yesterday. It was nice to be able to finally relate to a Portrayal of Persons person the irresponsibility of CBC with respect to the human rights of people disabled by pollution.

You will remember the travesty against the Smiths Falls' woman resulting from Ottawa journalists calling her credibility into question without reason, possible at CBC only through the violation of several CBC policies and by ignoring third party information gathered by myself in my responsibility as researcher for the local newsroom.

I share your bewilderment at the fact that members of a disabled group could have their credibility brought into question so irresponsibly, more than five years ago, that so many people in CBC could have been approached, and yet nothing has been done to address the damaging approach many CBC journalists continue to take to this day.

Your surprise at this is genuinely refreshing; so many others in CBC have said it doesn't surprise them at all.

Perhaps you could succeed where others have failed by encouraging CBC journalists to use appropriate experts when comments affect people's reputations, and to make sure supporting arguments are other than Rushtonesque when points of view are put forward which defame members of a disabled group or foster damaging public attitudes.

Some policy guidelines which might be applied in future coverage of the environmentally sensitive which have been violated or ignored in the past include:

- 1) "research should be carried out in co-operation with responsible research agencies",
- 2) "exercise care not to be 'captured' by the viewpoint of those who may have special interests",
- 3) "guarding against exaggeration or distortion",
- 4) "the greatest service it can render society is to show itself as it is evolving, neither magnified nor diminished."

5) "Insufficient attention may be paid to important trends and events which are not in themselves spectacular. Producers should constantly remind themselves of the importance of examining and keeping before the public those aspects of society which have a positive value as well as those which require amendment."

6) "The nature of journalism is to look for novelty and cap it with an attention-getting headline. But this search for the new carries with it the danger of falling into sensationalism, the exploitation of subordinate news values because of their piquancy, be they morbid, or scandalous."

Under libel advice, CBC policy recommends that:

1) "The statement of fact must contain all the relevant facts and not omit certain facts which if included would change the whole complexion."

2) "It would be unfair if a broadcaster reported the testimony of one witness which made grave accusations against another person but then failed to report other evidence which completely refuted such accusations."

3) "It is not the intention of the author but rather the impression that is conveyed to the casual or reasonable viewer which is critical."

4) "It is no defence for the broadcaster to state that he has reported simply what someone else has told him.", and "it is no better if the statements are modified by words such as 'we are informed by usually reliable sources', even if everyone in the community knows that this story is going around".

Libel, of course, is defined as "any written or printed (or broadcast) words which tend to lower a person in the estimation of right thinking men, or cause him to be shunned or avoided, or expose him to hatred or contempt or ridicule."

Jean Metcalfe of Smiths Falls was libelled by CBC, which ignored responsible research in favour of statements of partisan interests, exaggerated and distorted her concerns, concentrated on controversy while ignoring existing consensus, exploited subordinate values in her story while ignoring significant facts which would have completely refuted statements of the partisan interests who called her credibility into question.

More recent statements expressed by several CBC journalists (on and off-air) show that despite repeated approaches to management, CBC news and current affairs operations are still, even as recently as 1989, unaware of how their approach to this story has hurt people, how it violated and continues to violate

not only common sense, policies and ethics but also persons with this disability.

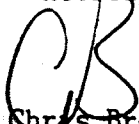
Until CBC management acts on the repeated expression of concern about problems with both the contextualization and the resulting coverage of this topic by its journalists, it will be acting in a discriminatory manner, applying its high principals in the provision of the service of journalism in general, but abandoning them with respect this disabled group.

You will notice I have not used any appeal to general goodwill, responsibility, or compassion, but have related the concern only to an expression of policy. With a few precious exceptions, it seems CBC is incapable of responding to an appeal on the basis of compassion or good sense, in that dozens of approaches bringing forward third party information indicating the fallacious and tangential nature of statements that have been used against us have been ignored.

I emphasize that there have been a few exceptions. There are some journalists who have understood that while there is debate in the medical community about how to categorize and treat these illnesses, there is no reason to cover the story in a way that questions the existence of the symptoms, their relationship to the environment, the credibility of victims, or the legitimacy of resulting social concerns.

I pray that people with chronic fatigue syndrome or with other poorly defined but legitimate health problems will not be dealt with in the same way the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation continues to deal with the environmentally sensitive. I hope the Corporation will end its practice of trashing the rights of people with health complaints by displacing them with acrimonious debate amongst doctors on appropriate medical response.

Sincerely,



Chris Brown
(613) 837 7173

cc Bill Akerley, Bruce Kingsley, Richard Chambers, Gerry Flaherty, Bill Morgan, Trina McQueen, Dennis Harvey, Gerry Janneteau, Doug Ward, David Bazet, Knolton Nash, Peter Mansbridge, Anna Maria Tremonte, Eve Savoury, Mark Starowicz, Bob Culbert, Barbara Frum, Paul Wright, Donna Logan, James Cullingham, Anne Bromley, Al Pressman, Arthur Lewis, Clay Carter, Joel Reumy, Bob Southcott - Open House, Media File, Donna Cressman-Dubois, Tim Knight, Skip Brooks - Secretariat for Disabled Persons, John Dwyer - Canadian Human Rights Commission, John Krauser - Ontario Medical Association, Dr. Bruce Halliday, M.P. - Chairman, Standing Committee on Human Rights, George Thomson - Deputy Minister of Citizenship, Ontario.

Ms M
Port
CBC
1500